

Uni-Online - Past, Presence - and Future

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Introduction

Uni-Online (formerly known as ET-Online) is a flexible e-learning environment tailored to master the daily tasks in educational institutions. Being one of the first Virtual University systems in the German academic domain, it has been developed and optimised for years, feedback of all participants has been taken into consideration. Uni-Online offers functionalities for the web-based administration of courses and students but also for the personalised view for each student. All important features relevant to students and faculty staff can be accessed with a standard web browser.

Past

The Uni-Online platform was developed during the project Virtual University, funded by the state of North-Rhine-Westphalia. Goal was the establishment, test, and evaluation of a system that represents all services of a traditional university and to enhance the system with the capabilities of new technologies. Main aspects always have been the presentation of content (enhanced with different kinds of multimedia) and the communication between tutor and student (using text and video based tools).

Presence

Uni-Online is part of the Campus-Source initiative started by the state of North-Rhine-Westphalia. The goal of this initiative is to promote the development of Open Source software for the academic and educational sector under the CampusSource license (A GNU license). The Uni-Online team is one of the founding members of this initiative. Uni-Online is offered for free through CampusSource including the program source and documentation for installing and extending the system.

Uni-Online is currently in operation at four educational institutions and one assurance company. Among these institutions is the faculty of electrical engineering at the University of Hagen, which developed the platform under the name ET-Online.

Future

Due to the immense response to Uni-Online from outside Germany (especially from Eastern Europe and the Asian region) the platform is currently extended for multilanguage support. Additionally, the source code (comments) and the documentation are translated into English to simplify installation and operation for non-German speaking people. Another upcoming task is to maintain the extensions and own developments of the institutions using Uni-Online (one condition of the CampusSource license is the provision of own source code resulting out of Uni-Online). A central quality management and a versioning system is in development.

Summary

Uni-Online is a practical solution for faculties that wish to quickly participate in the e-learning community. While commercial providers for e-learning solutions keep their customers locked in rigid license agreements, Uni-Online gives them total freedom. Furthermore, often commercial solutions lack urgently required features while containing functionalities which are not necessary in particular cases. Uni-Online provides the user with the possibility to adapt the software to their special needs.